

Promoting Access to Higher Education in Ghana for Human Resource Development through Distance Learning

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Abstract

The idea of using Distance Education (DE) for human resource development is not new in Ghana. It was more vibrant about three decades ago with several unsuccessful attempts. However, the idea resurfaced strongly between 1991 and 1994 that led to the introduction of a number of DE initiatives in all public universities in Ghana. The government had a strong conviction that despite the earlier difficulties, DE was still a viable complement to conventional tertiary education as universities were not able to admit all qualified applicants due to insufficient facilities. The question now is whether this system of education has been able to adequately meet the challenge of providing quality higher education in Ghana. This paper specifically explores how far the University of Cape Coast distance learning programme also known as centre for continuing education has been able to fulfill its mandate. Data was gathered through the use of questionnaire and results were analyzed using simple frequency distribution. Findings indicated that the introduction of the University of Cape Coast Distance Education has widened access to higher education in Ghana.

Keywords: Higher Education, Human Resource Development, Distance Learning/Centre for Continuing Education, Monitoring, Funding, Instructional Materials

1. Introduction

Education plays a vital role in shaping the destiny of a nation (Aggor, 2010). It is therefore, crucial for the system to be developed in such a way that people could be helped to acquire sophisticated skills that the country can fully utilize. The crucial role of higher education within the knowledge economy and the recognition of the need for highly skilled graduates to apply knowledge in order to advance economic competitiveness and social development must lead to improvement in policy positions and approaches towards the role of and investment in higher education in developing countries (Caine, 2011). There should therefore be an opportunity for many people to have access to higher education. Distance education has been identified as an alternative access to higher education in Ghana (Koomson, 2009).

According to Article 25 of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana: All person shall have the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities and with a view to achieving the full realization of that right- (a) basic education shall be free, compulsory and available to all; (b) secondary education in its different forms, including technical and vocational education, shall be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular, by the progressive introduction of free education; (c) higher education shall be made equal accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular, by progressive introduction of free education; (d) functional literacy shall be encouraged or intensified as far as possible (The Constitution of Republic of Ghana, 1992).

It is against this background that alternative arrangement has been made through distance education to provide higher education access to people who otherwise would have found it difficult to enjoy higher education. Mireku-Gyimah (1998) cited in Adrah (2000) adds that distance education provides the alternative modes of education. As part of the tertiary education reforms, the Ministry of Education in Ghana proposed distance education as an alternative and complementary mode of teacher education. The government of Ghana between 1991 and 1994 through the Ministry of Education (MOE) sponsored a number of surveys to assess the DE needs of Ghana (Adrah, 2000). Upon the recommendations from these surveys the universities in Ghana agreed to start distance education (DE) programmes. The four universities, University of Ghana, University of Cape Coast, University of Science and Technology and University of Education, Winneba started preparations for this new model of educational delivery. Consequently, as part of the tertiary education reforms of 1992, the Ministry of Education proposed distance education as an alternative and complementary mode of providing access to higher education in Ghana. As a result, the then Minister of Education, Hon. Henry Sawyerr, in 1996 launched the distance education programme at Winneba. As a policy, all the universities in Ghana, except the University for Development studies were charged to run their programmes by the dual mode of distance learning, taking care of

both on-campus and off-campus students (Adrah, 2000).

There have been a number of interpretations on the meaning of distance education. According to Moore and Kearsley (1996) distance education is defined as planned learning that normally occurs at different places and requires a well-defined system of delivery that includes modified teaching techniques, alternatives modes of communications, including, but not limited to technology as well as alternative administrative and organizational components. Distance education may also be defined as the type of education that takes place where the teacher and students are separated by physical distance where technological tools such as audio, video, text and print, often in concert with face-face communication, are used to bridge instructional gap (Koomson, 2009).

The University of Cape Coast established the Centre for Continuing Education(Distance Education) in 1997 in order to embark on the dual-mode distance education programme and mounted an all popular on-campus based programme on distance learning (Koomson, 2009). Before the distance education programme in 2001, the University of Cape Coast (UCC) had a total enrolment of about 3,584 students on its conventional programmes. As at 2010, the distance education programme run by the University of Cape Coast alone has a total enrolment of about 34,000 students, pursuing Diploma and Degree programmes in Basic education, Commerce and Management Studies (Akuamoah-Boateng, Sam-Tagoe, & Brown, 2010). By implication, UCC has been able to increase its enrolment from 3,584 in 2001 to 54,707 in 2010 through its distance education programme. This great expansion in the student enrolment means that higher education has been made accessible to many people in Ghana through the dual of education currently being operated by UCC.

It must be pointed out that distance learning is not new in Ghana. The country has had some form of distance education with correspondence colleges leading to the School Certificate Examination and some professional qualifications. The Institute of Adult Education, Legon (IAE) initiated some kind of correspondence programmes in addition to its face to face lectures. The Ghana Education Service also experimented with a modular programme to upgrade student teachers (Adrah, 2000).

Nevertheless, there has not been any conscious study on how distance education provides access to higher education to many people in Ghana as a guide for future research effort. It is in this direction, that it is deemed expedient that the success and challenges of providing access to higher education, using the distance education of the University of Cape Coast is worthy of consideration. It is hopeful that the findings of the study will help the general public to know the success story of distance education in the University of Cape Coast. It is anticipated that other sister universities either in or outside Ghana upon hearing how the University of Cape Coast distance education has created accessibility to higher education in Ghana, may initiate similar programmes. Again, through the findings, challenges that distance education students can be identified for possible solutions.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

It has become increasingly clear that higher education provides the human resource needs for the development of a nation Akyeampong (2003). It is on record that the mission of Ghana's distance programme is to make quality education at all levels more accessible and relevant to meet the learning needs of Ghanaians so as to enhance their performance and improve the quality of their lives (Koomson, 2009). And that distance education provides one of the avenues for individuals who otherwise would not have furthered their education to get a higher educational qualification. Higher education through distance learning started in the University of Cape Coast since 2001. However, it is yet to be known whether the distance education operated by the University of Cape Coast actually provides avenue to meet the challenges of providing quality higher education for the growing population in need of it. The gap needs to be filled, hence the study.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the extent to which the Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Cape Coast is providing access to higher education in Ghana. Specifically, the research is designed to achieve the following:

1. Ascertain the number of candidates who have passed through the UCC distance higher education programme from 2001-2010?
2. Find out the status of students' awareness of courses available in the higher education programmes at the Centre for Continuing Education.
3. Determine the extent of the programme accessibility to prospective candidates.
4. Establish the extent of availability of instructional materials for the programme.
5. Determine whether monitoring strategies have been put in place for the programme.
6. Ascertain whether funding facilities are made available to distance students.

1.3 Research Questions

1. The following research questions were raised to guide this study:
2. How many candidates have passed through the UCC distance higher education programme from 2001-2010?
3. What is the status of students' awareness of higher education programmes at the Centre for Continuing

Education?

4. To what extent is the Centre for Continuing Education programmes made accessible to prospective applicants?
5. What monitoring measures have been put in place by Centre for Continuing Education to ensure effective learning in the programmes?
6. What teaching instructional materials are available for the Centre for Continuing Education programmes?
7. What funding facilities are available to distance students?

2. Literature Review

Relevant literature was reviewed based on the following sub-heading:

1. Higher Education
2. Issues in distance education

2.1 Higher Education

Higher Education is all type of education of an institutional nature (Academic, professional, technological, teacher education) such as University colleges, liberal arts colleges, technological institutes and teacher training colleges for which the basic entrance requirement is completion of full secondary education. The usual entrance age is about 18 years and the programme leads to the giving of a named award (degree, diploma or certificate) of higher studies (Addo, 2010). The UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights of 1966, in Article 13, asserts that higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education. These statements presuppose that there should be conscious efforts to formulate and implement policies to ensure that concepts, values skills are properly transmitted to the current and the next generation through higher education.

Higher Education enables individuals to create economic benefits for the nation. The new knowledge and skills acquired by way of education helps with the overall human development of the nation. Higher education is important to the individual. Ansere (1976) identifies the benefits of education to the individual as bringing direct financial returns through higher education. It therefore follows that an individual who acquires higher education is capable of contributing to the overall good of the society and also has great opportunity for self-advancement.

2.2 Issues in Distance Education Theories

The most quoted and perhaps most misunderstood research study conducted in the field of distance education was by Russell (1999). Russell reviewed 355 studies on distance education from the year 1928 to 1998. A majority of the studies in Russell's work compared instruction via some type of distance education technology to traditional on-campus courses. The student measures that were compared consisted of test scores, grades, students' satisfaction, and/ or other measures that were specific to a certain study in the review. The results were overwhelmingly consistent; statistical tests indicated "no significant differences" between the distance education groups and the traditional, on-campus groups (Anderson, 2003). Distance education delivery method as compared to the traditional forms of educational delivery was found to be statistically indifferent in students' achievement (Anderson, 2003).

With the proliferation of distance education programmes, the concerns and issues facing distance education, in terms of quality, come to the forefront. According to Gladieux and Swail (1999), the notion that expansion of distance education is being driven by demand rather than sound pedagogy has created some concern. Sherry (2003) mentions "providing exemplary pedagogical experiences within rapidly changing technological environments can be somewhat difficult and takes the combined efforts of everyone in the distance learning enterprises" (p.435).

Schlosser and Anderson (1994) hint that distance students bring basic characteristics to their learning experiences, which influence their success in course work. They are, according to the authors, voluntarily seeking further education, have post-secondary education goals with expectations of higher grades, are highly motivated and self-disciplined and are older. Koomson (2009) stresses that distance education in Ghana is being used by University of Cape Coast as a crucial tool for providing Basic School teachers with in-service education in the subjects they teach and for providing tertiary education more cheaply than by the conventional means. By implication, many individuals will be provided the opportunity for self-improvement through distance education.

3. Methodology

The descriptive research design was adopted in this study since the intention was to generalize from a sample of population so that references could be made about some characteristics, attitude or behaviour. The participants were final year education students on the distance learning programme at the University of Cape Coast who were presumed to be adequately tutored and therefore are capable of responding to the questionnaire. The questionnaire which was the research instrument, was designed for students to complete. A sample size of 360 respondents was purposively drawn from a population of 1985 final year Diploma in Basic Education students of distance education in all the centres in the regions of Ghana who are undergoing the programme at the

University of Cape Coast. Thus, in each of 12 study centres, 30 basic education students were chosen. Copies of the questionnaire were given to staff from the University of Cape Coast, who were going to have face-to-face interaction with students at the centres to administer. Two weeks were used for the data collection and the retrieval rate was 87%. The data collected were first checked to remove incomplete questionnaires. Ethically, the respondents were informed about the intentions of the research for academic purpose and were given the option to respond. Data gathered from the field were analysed with the aid of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) VERSION 16.0 in line with the research questions raised using frequency counts and percentages. The result is presented in tables.

In responding to research question one, the Students Record and Management Information Section, at the University of Cape Coast, was contacted for the distance education records from 2001 to 2010. This was to enable the researchers to check for the access that the University of Cape Coast distance education has made from 2001-2012.

3.1 Presentation of results

3.1.1 Number of Candidates who have had Higher Education through Distance Education

Information obtained on number of students who had higher education through distance education programme from 2001-2010 is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of admissions to campus-based and distance programmes from 2001-2010

Year	Qualified applicants admitted (campus-based)			Qualified applicants admitted (distance education programme)			Grand Total
	Gender		Total	Gender		Total	
	Male	Female		Male	Female		
2001/2002	7,201	2,621	9,822	433	288	721	10,543
2002/2003	8,133	3,504	11,637	1,388	926	2,314	13,951
2003/2004	8,434	4,018	12,452	1,727	1,151	2,878	15,330
2004/2005	10,141	4,018	15,030	2,797	1,998	4,795	19,825
2005/2006	11,387	5,703	17,090	3,189	2,126	5,315	22,405
2006/2007	11,623	5,449	17,072	3,589	2,392	5,981	23,053
2007/2008	11,361	5,445	16,806	4,201	2,800	7,001	23,807
2008/2009	11,108	5,296	16,404	3,881	2,587	6,468	22,872
2009/2010	10,710	5,048	15,758	7,788	11,446	19,234	34,992
Total	78,021	36,841	114,862	28,993	25,714	54,707	169,569

Table1 shows the documentary analyses of campus-based conventional and distance education students who have passed through the University of Cape Coast. It is clear from the Table that since 2001 to 2010, out of the grand total of 169,569 students, 54,707 have passed through the distance education programme. On the whole, the University of Cape Coast distance education has made 32.3% progressive rise in students' access to higher education in Ghana in addition 67.7% admission in the conventional university admission. With the limited facilities in the conventional universities in Ghana, a lot more students would have been denied access to higher education. It is no wonder that Koomson (2009) makes it clear that the distance education programme has come to ease the academic burden of the conventional universities in Ghana.

3.1.2 Students' Awareness of Programmes offered by Centre for Continuing Education

Information of obtained from the respondents on the awareness of programmes offered on distance education by the Centre for Continuing Education is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Awareness of programmes offered by Centre for Continuing Education

Statement	Available		Unaware		Unavailable	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Diploma in Basic Education	206	100	0	0	0	0
Post Diploma in Basic Education	164	85	13	7	16	8
Diploma in Commerce	142	76	29	15	17	9
Post Diploma in Commerce	129	70	38	21	18	10
Master Programme in IT	37	21	110	63	28	16
Diploma in Basic Education	206	100	0	0	0	0
Post Diploma in Basic Education	164	85	13	7	16	8

Table 2 shows that all the 216 respondents admitted that the centre made diploma education available to students. On the Post-Diploma in Basic Education, 164 (85%) admitted that it was available whereas 16 (8%) said the programme was unavailable. On the Diploma in Commerce, 142 (76%) of respondents said it was available, 29 (15%) said they were unaware of the programme, while 17 (9%) said the programme was unavailable. On the Master Programme in IT, 37 (21%) of the respondents mentioned that it was available, while 110 (63%) said that they were unaware of the programme.

3.1.3 Accessibility of Distance Education programmes

In order to find out how the Centre for Distance Education is promoting access to higher education, the respondents' views on this variable was sought. Information obtained is shown in Table 3.

Table3: Accessibility of Distance Education Programme

Statement	True		False		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
More than one centre is located in each region	163	80	42	20	205	100
Location of the study centres in the regions not to travel long distance	102	52	94	48	196	100
Course tutors are always around to help students	161	77	48	23	209	100
Feedback on students' performance are offered promptly	83	42	113	58	196	100
Well designed time-table is followed	176	85	32	15	208	100
Students complaints are addressed at the study centres	74	37	127	63	201	100
Many people getting access to higher education	180	87	27	13	207	100

Table 3 shows that 163 (80%) of the respondents admitted that higher education was made accessible to students by mentioning more than one centre in each of the ten regions in Ghana. Islam (2007) found out that in Bangladesh the wide spread of study centres increased enrolment in their distance learning. This finding supports Brown and Koomson's (2009) claim that more centres have been created in all the ten regions to ensure that many people get university education. Again, 161(77%) respondents admitted that course tutors were always around to help students in times of need. With this interaction, the physical separation, feeling of isolation, lack of support and feeling of disconnected mentioned by Tinto (1993) as problems associated with distance learning will be minimized. About 113 (58%) responded that feedback on their performance was not offered promptly. Out of the 208 respondents, 178 (85%) responded that there was a well designed time-table for the distance learning programme. One hundred and twenty-seven (63%) responded that students' complaints were addressed at the study centres. About 180 (87%) admitted that many people were getting access to higher education through distance learning.

3.1.4 Availability and Quality of Instructional Materials

Since invariably, students depend on the availability of instructional resources for effective learning, they were asked how they were getting access to the use of instructional materials. Table 4 shows their responses

Table 4: Availability and Quality of Instructional Materials

Statement	True		False		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Modules are given on time	129	62	80	38	209	100
I get the required modules for the programme	179	87	28	14	266	100
Modules explain course objective clearly	167	80	41	20	208	100
I find no problem in using the modules	123	59	85	41	208	100
Course tutors supplement their teaching with Teaching and Learning materials	59	28	152	72	211	100
Modules are free from mistakes	30	14	178	86	208	100
Different methods of teaching are used	113	57	86	43	189	100

Table 4 shows that 129 (62%) of the respondents admit that modules are given on time while 80 (32%) responded on the contrary. Again, out of 208 respondents, 167 (80%) reveal that they find no problem in using the learning modules. Interestingly, 152 (72%) respondents say that course tutors do not supplement their teaching with teaching and learning materials. Surprisingly, 178(86%) respondents are of the view that the learning modules are not free from mistakes. Meanwhile, they have earlier admitted they have no problems with modules. The 113 (57%) respondents admit that different methods of teaching are used by course tutors.

3.1.5 Monitoring of Programmes

Another dimension of the accessibility of the distance learning programmes is their monitoring (Keegan, 1988). Hence, information was sought from respondents on monitoring measures adopted by the establishing institution. Responses obtained are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Monitoring of Distance Programme

Statement	True		False		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
UCC staff monitor students' programme	128	63	75	37	203	100
Face-to-face is conducted to address students' problems	175	87	26	13	201	100
Director and his team tour the study centres	77	38	125	62	202	100
Students' quiz exam results are released to students on time	47	23	158	77	205	100
Detailed results are published each semester	149	75	51	25	200	100
Quality assurance develop instrument to monitor teaching and learning	148	74	52	26	200	100
Course tutors monitor students' programme	102	52	93	48	195	100

Table 5 reveals that out of the 208 respondents, 128 (63%) admit that course tutors monitor students programmes, 175 (87%) say that face-to-face is conducted to address students' learning problems. Surprisingly, 125(62%) say the Director and his team do not visit the learning the study centres regularly. As to whether students' quizzes

are released on time, 158 (77%) respondents say that it is false. For detailed results being given on time, 149 (75%) say it is true while 51 (26%) say it is false. On the Quality Assurance Unit developing instruments to monitor teaching learning, 149 (75%) admitted in affirmative.

3.1.6 Funding of Distance Learners

Research question six sought to information on the support funding available to student in a bid to promote access to higher education. Data on this is captured in Table 6.

Table 6: Responses of students on availability of funding support to students

Statement	True		False		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Students get allowance from government to support their programmes	4	2	202	98	204	100
UCC offers financial support to brilliant but needy distance learners	4	2	197	98	201	100
Staying home to pursue the programmes eases financial burden	105	51	102	49	207	100

From Table 6, 202 (98%) of the respondents say they do not get allowance from the government in pursuing the distance learning. As to whether the University of Cape Coast offers financial support to brilliant but needy students, 197 (98%) say that there is no provision made for the brilliant by needy students by the centre. On whether staying home to pursue the distance programme eases financial burden of students, 105 (51%) respondents admit it to be true while 102 (49%) think otherwise.

4. Discussion of Findings

The study shows that from 2001/2002 to 2009/2010 academic year, the number of students who enrolled into the University of Cape Coast distance education programme was 54,707 while that of the campus-based students for the same year was 114,862. It can be deduced that the University of Cape Coast distance education has made 32.3% progressive rise in students' access to higher education in Ghana in addition to the 67.7% admission in the conventional university admission. With the limited facilities in the conventional universities in Ghana, a lot more students who would have been denied access to higher education have gained admission. This finding is in accord with that of Koomson (2009) who found that the distance education programme in the University has come to ease the academic burden of the conventional universities in Ghana.

Again, the introduction of distance learning at the University of Cape Coast has brought about higher education in programmes such as basic education, commerce and master's programme degree in Information Technology (IT) to many people who otherwise would have been denied access. Perraton (1992) states that the government of Malawi runs the Malawi Certificate of Distance Education (MCDE) for primary school learners who do not gain entry to the residential secondary schools. It was however, found in the study that many people were not aware of the Master's in the information technology (IT) programme in distance learning. Meanwhile, Islam (2007) has echoed the need to take revolutionary steps to promote IT programmes in distance learning to make students catch up with the technological world. The basic education programme is the most accessible distance learning programme run by the University of Cape Coast. This may be due to the fact there are many basic school educators who have graduated from teacher training college in Ghana which the University of Cape Coast has targeted to offer higher education. The study supports Adrah's (2000) finding that in the University of Education, Winneba-Ghana, majority of the students in the distance programme consists of the students of Basic Education.

On how distance education makes higher education accessible, the study has revealed the location of the centres in each of the regions of Ghana, the interaction of course tutors with students, well-developed time-table among others have expanded access to higher education. The problems raised on the accessibility were the delay in students' feedback as well as students' complaints not being promptly addressed at the study centres. Hill, Wiley, Nelson and Hahn (1991) note that beginning students may have some difficulty determining what the demands of a course of academic study actually are because they do not have an immediate peer group, ready access to the instructor or familiarity with the technology used for delivery of distance courses.

The present study has also unveiled that instructional materials are available for the distance learning programme run by the University of Cape Coast. Modules are given to students on time, with well explained objectives and different teaching methods. The problem they have with the instructional materials is that course tutors do not supplement their teaching with other materials.

On the mechanisms being put in place to monitor students' learning, the students admit that course tutors monitor students' programme, face-to-face interaction is conducted to address students' problem and detail results are given each semester. The quality assurance unit develops instruments for students to check their performance. Majority of the students, however, do not often see the Director of the distance learning programme and his team visit the centres. This is surprising because Akuamoah-Boateng, Sam-Tagoe and Brown (2010) expressed in their study that the University of Cape Coast Director of Education (UCC, DE) programmes relies heavily on over one thousand course tutors at the various study centres who handle centres' week end face-to-face tutorial sessions. Such course tutors support the monitoring team from the University to supervise teaching, quizzes, examinations as well as students' attendance and welfare. It is most likely that majority of distance learners do not know the people who monitor their programmes.

On the funding of the programmes, the study has revealed that students do not get allowance from government to support the programmes and that the Centre for Distance Learning does not financially support brilliant but needy students. One would have expected that just as students in the conventional universities are given study leave with pay, at least those on distance learning programmes should be given financial support to cushion the effect of the financial burden of fee payment. It is, however on record that UCC DE supports students for post-graduate studies, which implies that financial support does not start from the undergraduate level.

5. Recommendations

In order to continually provide access to higher education, there is the need to create and maintain a dynamic and educationally sound distance education through needs assessment concerning students' requirements for alternative courses and methods of instructional delivery. The centre needs to advertise the Masters and IT programmes frequently and ensure that it is made accessible to prospective students through more elaborate advertisement. This could include making use of the mass media and distributing flyers.

There is need to evaluate course content and delivery methods to ensure that academic rigour and student learning in programmes or courses are comparable to or exceed other programmes or courses offered on campus through traditional delivery.

The director and his team should constantly visit the learning centres so that the concerns of students can be addressed promptly and also in order to explain the mission and vision of distance education to members.

The course tutors should be encouraged to supplement their teaching with other materials so that students' knowledge is not limited only to the modules used in their studies. Tutors should not relent in their efforts of using teaching/learning resources since this will help them to form mental impression of what is being taught in class.

The government should also find a means of supporting distance learners financially just as she has been doing to those on the conventional programmes. The centre should not only support the graduate students financially, the undergraduate students, who are brilliant but needy, should also be identified and supported financially so that they can also enjoy higher education.

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